

## Dungeon and Hestia

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## Dungeon and Hestia

### Aza Hinazuki's Terrible Life and a Christmas Tree in February

Hinazuki was going to disappear sometime in March. Her body would be found in April lying in the park. Fujinuma Satoru needed to know what day she was going to disappear. He remembered she was only 10 years old at the time of her disappearance. Satoru also remembered her birthday was sometime in winter. X-day was sometime between March 1st and her birthday. Unfortunately, he didn't know her birthday. If he can figure it out, he should be able to prevent those deaths.

February 18th 1988

An ice skating area of flat ice was setup near the school. Most of the ice formed a roughly circular area. On a slight elevation above it, an ice path that curved back and forth led to the school. Satoru's class and two others had PE. Some were skating below. Large snow banks over a meter high were mounted on the sides of the ice path and most of the circle below except for a spot to enter the path and three spots around the circle. Satoru's class had the boys set to race against each other.

Both the girls and Satoru's friends thought Hamada, a brown haired kid, was going to get the best time. As Hamada passed some cheering girls, he muttered "shut up already" Whatever happened in the last seven days did not make Hamada happy. Three of his friends being absent the week probably didn't add to it.

Yashiro-sensei was mediating the races. Satoru got pared against Hamada. Satoru thought about Hamada. Hamada was a regular on the ice hockey team, the kind who'd win the national championship. Hamada later went to a different high school than Satoru, but he did remember an acquaintance mentioning that Hamada was the star right wing of his team despite being a better center than their actual center. He remembered racing against Hamada years ago.

"Fujinuma, are you going to win?" asked Hinazuki, once again wearing her bright red coat.

"I'll go as fast as I can" said Satoru. Hinazuki wished him luck. They lined up at the start.

The teacher blew his whistle signaling the start. Both boys went at their fastest. Satoru started outpacing Hamada and took the "inside" of the curves on the ice path, gaining additional centimeters of lead. Satoru's four friends cheered him on. At least 13 girls who knew Hamada as well as Satoru did cheered Hamada. Kazu was amazed at Satoru's speed.

Satoru skated forward with maximum effort. The cramp was building in his legs. As a kid, Satoru was really fast with his arms and fairly fast with every part of his body. On the other hand, his stamina was no more than a non-athlete kid. Satoru knew he with his small lead, he stood a good chance of beating Hamada if only because the race wasn't long enough for Hamada's stamina to matter. But "Is it okay for me to win? Would victory have any meaning? It is just a pride race between elementary school boys. Actually, since this was only a PE race, for most kids even pride wasn't at stake. This guy goes through hard training every day. After December, I only skated for fun once a week in this 1988. The winner should be" thought Satoru. He started gliding the last 3 meters.

"Hamada!" said Yashiro-sensei.

"Goal!" exclaimed a girl at the finish simultaneously.

Satoru's friends were excited. "Satoru gave Hamada a run for his money!" cried Kazu. Satoru was too out of breath to reply. Even after throwing the last few meters, he had still spent all his stamina.

Hamada had beaten his 4th best time on this unofficial path. In other words, he did better on this same place. He was annoyed at Fujinuma. Hamada reached over and picked up Fujinuma Satoru by the collar. "Fujinuma! I hate punks like you!" Hamada screamed.

"What's wrong with Hamada?" asked Hiromi, Satoru's friend with long black, for a boy, hair.

"It's like he lost" said Osumu, Satoru's friend with glasses.

"Should I punch him?" threatened Kazu, Satoru's large friend with spiky brown hair.

"It's (huff) ok. Leave it" said Satoru. Suddenly he remembered. He made the same mistake 18 years ago. Hamada said exactly the same thing the first time. Kenya, the blond haired kid, continued to stare

at Satoru.

The last class of the day was algebra. Satoru tried to chase after Hinazuki. "Hamada was really fast" said Satoru. "When is your birthday?"

"You said you wouldn't lie to me" said Hinazuki.

"I'm sorry. For some reason I thought Hamada should win today" said Satoru. Hinazuki rebuffed him. After turning down an offer to walk home from Hiromi, Satoru walked towards the staff room. He needed to know her birthday.

There didn't appear to be anyone present. Satoru poked around and flipped through some papers. He needed the roster. One book said "5th year, Class 14. Homeroom teacher Yashiro Gaku" This probably contained it. He started to open the book when a hand gently grabbed his shoulder.

Satoru turned around and saw a dark haired adult. "Yashiro-sensei" said Satoru, stretching his arms wide and looking sheepish. Yashiro-sensei smiled.

"Is it about Kayo?" asked Yashiro-sensei.

"I wanted to look up her birthday. Sorry" said Satoru.

"You seem to be getting along with her lately. Did you try asking for yourself" said Yashiro-sensei looking through the booklet.

"I told her my birthday, but she wouldn't tell me mine" said Satoru.

"Ah, that makes sense. Here have a look" said Yashiro-sensei opening up to the roster and handing it over. Satoru saw that Hinazuki Kayo's birthday was March 2nd. It was his own birthday. Satoru thanked Yashiro-sensei. "Well, Kayo is kind of shy, so it was probably pretty hard for her to say it" said Yashiro-sensei. "It's probably best for you not to make a big deal out of it"

"Yeah I will. Well, excuse me" said Satoru.

"Satoru. That was a close race today. Doing your best is key to everything. I'm counting on you for Kayo too" said Yashiro-sensei with a wink.

"Yes!" said Satoru with his own smile. "Yashiro Gaku he's about my age this time period. He has a good observing eye" thought Satoru. As he went home, he considered what he had learned. X-day was March 1st. That was the day Hinazuki would die if she was left in the park. 12 days from this point.

Satoru looked in the park, but Hinazuki was absent. A white paper glider flew down to his knees. "Satoru-kun!" called out a friendly voice. A brown haired figure with a somewhat homely face appeared. His hair was in a cap. It was Jun, aka Yuuki

` Yuuki invited Satoru to his room for a few hours. Looks like since I told you three years ago to pick a trait about a popular kid to emulate to get yourself to open up, you added quite a few friends to

your circle beyond one. Good for you" he said. "It's because you mustered up courage. The feeling you had to want to have fun got across" Yuuki was the stuttering and soft hearted soul Satoru remembered. He was most defiantly not the culprit. The two of them talked about Hinazuki. Apparently he talked to her a few times, but he couldn't get a conversation or learn anything about her.

Satoru also learned that Yuuki worked at his father's bento shop. Yuuki works from 7 in the morning to noon before the shop takes a lunch break. Yuuki doesn't come back after the break. Satoru was surprised that Yuuki was employed, something he didn't realize the first time. Yuuki was 23 in this time period, younger than Satoru in the present.

On one of the bookshelves, there were a few gay porn magazines. Satoru's face expressed shock. Yuuki saw that and quickly turned to where Satoru was looking at. He covered them up with a drape. "Those aren't mine! Someone gave them to me and I didn't throw them out yet" he stammered. Satoru guessed that those were given to further frame Yuuki. Satoru's testimony of their existence the previous time must have made things worse.

After some time, Satoru made a motion to leave the house. As he walked over to his jacket and put it on, Yuuki made an observation. "Satoru-kun, you've become more mature somehow."

"Yeah" said Satoru. As he left his thoughts started swirling. In the present Shiratori Jun was on death row for those murders. Satoru still couldn't believe Yuuki did those. As long as Satoru can prevent the abductions, there is nothing to frame him.

The next day Satoru went over to the Hinazuki residence. It was kind of a dump, with some trash bags that were unpicked up and litter around the shed area. No one seemed to be home, despite the fact that there was no school so at the very least Hinazuki should be home. Satoru saw some torn red gloves, a backpack and its contents were strewn out in a trail with some footprints in the snow, leading to a shed. He opened it up. Inside was Hinazuki in a nightgown with several bruises. "You'll freeze" said Satoru, taking off his coat and approaching Hinazuki.

"Close the door... stay away from me!" screamed Hinazuki.

"What are you doing here Kayo?" said a light haired woman. It was Hinazuki Akemi, Hinazuki Kayo's mother. "Let's go inside" She forcefully grabbed her daughter and put on a red cloak. Satoru confronted the woman and asked how the girl got so badly hurt.

"I fell" lied Hinazuki Kayo. Satoru opened his eyes wide open and started at her. She did not look back. He didn't think of a good answer to that sad lie.

February 21st 1988

Satoru hung out with his friends and talked about preparation for his birthday party. Kenya and Kazu both realized that Satoru had something else on his mind. Kazu was invited over to the Fujinuma residence for dinner.

February 22nd 1988

Satoru prepared a fire for the class in the heater. Fujinuma Satoru and Hinazuki had class duty that day. Hinazuki arrived late. Satoru realized a new mark was on the back of her neck, not quite hidden by the hair. The two of them collected the lunch fee. Satoru needed to fix the problems. He needed to change the future, but he was running out of past.

During a break, Satoru told everything he saw to Yashiro-sensei. He even seemed to know a little about it. Satoru wanted to know everything Yashiro-sensei knew. "I'm struggling to tell the class about it. If anyone knew she was being physically abused, they might not want to interact with her. That would be bad enough, but she doesn't have a close friend who could understand." said Yashiro-sensei. "I know for you it's not, so I'll tell you everything. But don't let the class know"

"To be honest, I started suspecting her last May. But there wasn't any tangible evidence. Kayo's mother hid the wounds. The Child Consultation Center visited her three times since I alerted them in September, but maybe because the mother has good intuition both of them were not in the house, so an official interview was not conducted yet"

"What the hell? Then they're incompetent" said Satoru. He realized he just said that out loud.

"I've sent her mother a few times and there is defiantly physical abuse going on. Now the Child Consultation center just needs to confirm it so they'll take Kayo away from her mother" said Yashiro-sensei. He already made the preliminary arrangements. "but once that happens, she'll no longer be in this class" he finished, arching his back on his seat so his eyes were level with Satoru who was standing.

"If that saves Hinazuki, I don't care. Hurry sensei" said Satoru. He was sure Yashiro was going to take action spring break. Unfortunately, that will be too late. Satoru got agitated.

Hours later, it was time for lunch. Three of the students were warming up the hot portions of the meals. Satoru couldn't find the lunch money. "I'm 29 years old and I'm involved with an incident like this?" thought Satoru. He reported that the week's lunch money was lost.

"I think someone must have stolen it! And I'm suspicious of Hinazuki-san. Hinazuki-san doesn't pay for her lunches and I think the culprit has to be someone who's poor" said a pig tailed haired girl named Misato.

A search into people's bags for lunch money started. Misato seemed to be really pushing for search. Others had been eliminated and Hinazuki was left, reaching in and "Here it is" she said holding the money.

"See? Just as I said. Kayo is the thief!" yelled out Misato.

"Shut up! Hinazuki would never steal from anyone!" said Satoru. He bet Misato did it, after all she was the one who pushed others to search for the thief. Kenya pointed out anyone could have taken the

money and put it as a plant.

Yashiro-sensei clapped his hands to quiet the class. "Listen, Kayo is on duty today, so there is nothing unusual about her having the lunch money. Satoru, that's the end of it. Let's have lunch OK?" he said.

After school was over, the duty students needed to bring their class's trash from the classroom to the main bin. That was Fujinuma Satoru and Hinazuki Kayo. The air was warm enough to go without jackets. There was an awkward silence. "Fujinuma, thanks for earlier" said Hinazuki.

"It's OK, what she said was uncalled for. Although objectively speaking, I barely know you any more than her so there isn't a whole lot of reason for me to trust you over her. I just did so without good reason" said Satoru.

"In our 3rd year, Misato kept making fun of my pencils, so I threw her prized mechanical pencil out the window. She's hated ever since, although it's mutual" said Hinazuki.

"I would have to say she has enough reason to believe she deserves to get some payback on you if she hasn't already. But framing you was well over the line" said Satoru as he dumped the trash into the main bin.

"One day she invited me to a Christmas party. It was just to show off her Christmas tree, but it was beautiful" said Hinazuki.

Satoru remembered something. "Wanna go see one after this?" said Satoru.

"See what" said Hinazuki.

"A Christmas tree" said Satoru with an anticipated smile on his face.

"Are you an idiot?"

In the end Hinazuki ended up following. The sun had set half an hour ago and they were still climbing a snow ridden mountain. "I come here to skin now and then. I see red foxes sometimes" he said.

Two red foxes emerged from the cover of the conifers and circled them from a meter away. Satoru expressed his awe. 18 years before, from his perspective, he saw them this week, but no one believed him.

"I wonder if they're a couple" said Hinazuki.

"Yeah, I bet they are" said Satoru. Then they both realized Hinazuki had grabbed his arm and a hand while trying to avoid touching the foxes. "ahhh" they both said as they separated, somewhat embarrassed.

As they climbed the mountain further, they reached a local peak. One conifer stood triple the height of all the other trees that were there. Translucent icicles hung down from it, some of them more than 30 cm long, far longer than the ice on the nearby trees. With no clouds in the sky, the dying glow of the west sky combined with the

lights of the star and Venus made the icicles sparkle. "A Christmas tree! Right?" said Satoru.

"Are you an idiot? It's February" said Hinazuki.

"Let's see this again in the summer. This Chiasmas treeâ€|" said Satoru.

"Are you an idiot?" said Hinazuki, holding Satoru's hand and smiling for the first time in a long time.

At the same time, in this very late hour, Kenya was having a talk with someone with the same hair as Yashiro-sensei in the school building. Once again, it should be noted the sun went down some time ago.

End  
file.